



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
DISTRICT 4  
**File #:** 20-797

Board Meeting Date: 10/20/2020

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
**From:** Supervisor Warren Slocum, District 4  
Supervisor Carole Groom, District 2  
**Subject:** Extension of Term for San Mateo County Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution to extend the term of Aileen Cassinetta to the honorary post of San Mateo County Poet Laureate for an additional year from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The tradition of naming a Poet Laureate began in 17th century England when John Dryden was first named to the post. The United States Library of Congress appointed an official Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1937. In 1985, an Act of Congress changed the name of the position to Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

California was the first state to name a Poet Laureate informally and the position was established by the Legislature in 2001. A number of California counties and cities have followed suit and established the position of Poet Laureate, including the Bay Area counties of San Francisco, Marin, Napa, Sonoma, Alameda, Santa Clara and San Mateo.

In April 2013, the Board of Supervisors approved a resolution establishing the honorary post of San Mateo County Poet Laureate for the purpose of elevating poetry into the consciousness of San Mateo County residents and highlighting and celebrating the literary arts within our County.

On October 8, 2013, the Board of Supervisors approved a resolution naming Caroline Goodwin as our County's first Poet Laureate. Since that time, Lisa Rosenberg and Aileen Cassinetta have each been appointed successively to serve two-year terms as Poet Laureate. Aileen Cassinetta's term as the County's third Poet Laureate was to end this year on December 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The Poet Laureate represents San Mateo County and the art of poetry through outreach activities related to poetry; will propose and lead a community project throughout their term; will present

appropriate works at a minimum of four selected County-sponsored events during the year, including events involving schools and youth; and will open the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors meetings with a poem every quarter.

Aileen Cassinetta began her two-year term as Poet Laureate of San Mateo County on January 1, 2019. In her first year, she visited 14 communities in the county, launched her “Speak Poetry” campaign, gave over 50 readings around the Bay Area, and promoted her events on tv, radio and print media. In April 2020, she curated the poem, “Love in the Time of COVID-19: A Community Poem for Healthcare Workers and Other Frontliners,” which gathered lines of hope and healing from San Mateo County residents and raised money for the San Mateo County Health Foundation’s COVID-19 fund. The poem was shared widely on social media, and was recited in Mystic, Connecticut on Memorial Day. She is currently organizing a virtual book festival that will feature over 50 authors, in collaboration with local libraries.

The reasons for extending for one year the term of Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta are several. First - her work during this pandemic has been exemplary as noted above, particularly her outreach to youth who have been distance learning since March. Poet Laureate Cassinetta has encouraged many school-age youth to write, create and even publish poems to help them to understand this pandemic. Furthermore, we believe that it is important to have continuity in this program during these most challenging times. To extend this Poet Laureate’s term would do just that and carry on her meaningful work.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the Resolution as to form.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

None.